

Phil 2110  
Knowledge  
Third Essay Topics

*Write 5-7 pages (1250-1750 words) on **one** of the following topics.*

*You should answer the questions simply and straightforwardly, in your own words.  
You should write with as much clarity, precision and care as you can.*

*There is no need to consult any secondary sources for this paper.  
But if you do consult any sources, you must appropriately cite all sources you consult.*

*Due Friday 3 December by 4:30 pm.  
Submit one copy of your assignment on paper to Ms Loletta Li, Main Building room 302.*

*I am happy to confer with you about your paper, and to talk with you about your work in progress.*

1. Haslanger says "a discussion of the truth conditions for knowledge claims that does not critically reflect on the broader purposes for our use of the concept, and that does not take up the issue of epistemic value is impoverished." (476) What does Haslanger mean here? Should we agree with her? Why or why not?

2. According to Deutsch, Gettier does not rely on intuitions to argue that justified true belief is not sufficient for knowledge. Is Deutsch right about this? Why or why not?

3. In "Can empirical knowledge have a foundation?", Bonjour argues that there are no basic beliefs--- that is there are no beliefs which are justified, but not justified by other beliefs. Explain Bonjour's argument very carefully. (Take about 3 or 4 pages.) Then spend the rest of the paper answering the following question: What does Bonjour's argument show? (If you think that Bonjour's argument shows that there are no basic beliefs, then consider some objections to Bonjour's argument, and explain how Bonjour can respond to those objections. If you think Bonjour's argument does not show that there are no basic beliefs, then explain why. And then explain what the argument does show.)

4. In "What is justified belief?" Goldman claims that a belief is justified just in case it results from a reliable belief forming process. Explain Goldman's proposal in detail (in a page or two). Then evaluate the following counterexample to Goldman's proposal:

Jake is a brain in a vat and so is Earl. These brains are each connected to computers which feed the brains information which make Jake and Earl have experiences just like those of an ordinary person living a normal life. Jake is a very careful in forming beliefs about the external world. He weighs his evidence carefully, and reasons slowly and carefully to be sure not to make any mistakes. Earl, on the other hand, is careless. He jumps to conclusions. He forms beliefs on weak evidence. He is careless in reasoning.

It seems that, according to Goldman's proposal, neither Jake nor Earl is justified in his beliefs about the external world. For their belief forming processes produce mostly false beliefs about the external world; their belief forming processes are equally unreliable. However, intuitively, Jake's beliefs are more justified than Earl's.

5. In "Externalist theories of empirical knowledge", Bonjour presents the example of Norman the clairvoyant. Norman's faculty of clairvoyance is reliable; however, Norman has no evidence that his faculty of clairvoyance is reliable. Nor does Norman have any evidence that his faculty of clairvoyance is unreliable. According to Bonjour, the beliefs that Norman forms by clairvoyance are unjustified. Explain Bonjour's argument that the beliefs that Norman forms by clairvoyance are unjustified. According to the reliabilist, Norman's clairvoyance beliefs are justified. Explain why. Does Bonjour's example show that reliabilism is wrong? Or can the reliabilist respond to Bonjour's argument?

6. You may develop your own paper topic. Your paper may only concern things we have discussed in class after 25 October. You must submit a proposal to me by Thursday November 25, at 12:30PM. Your proposal will explain, in one page or less, what question or questions you will try to answer. If I accept your proposal, then (and only then) you will be permitted to write on your own topic.